

TRAVELERS FAR AFIELD

they reached Taos and other Mexican Towns, between that and Santa Fe. The party committed no depredations in that country and indeed were traveling more for the pleasure and to see the world than with a view to war. They were absent from the nation three years and appear to have been the only Blackfeet to have been so far from home.⁷ 484

This party may have taken the same route followed by the Piegan war party which brought back Spanish loot in 1787. Probably both groups of travelers followed the Old North Trail, described more than sixty years ago by the aged North Piegan chief, Brings-Down-the-Sun, as running southward from present Calgary "along the eastern side of the Rockies, at a uniform distance from the Mountains, keeping clear of the forests, and outside the foothills. It ran close to where the city of Helena now stands and extended south into the country [Mexico] inhabited by a people with dark skins, and long hair falling over their faces." At that time the Piegans showed Walter McClintock traces of this old trail. He observed that "the old horse trail and travois tracks were still plainly visible, having been worn deep by many generations of traveling Indians."⁸ 487

More recently the late H. P. Lewis, an amateur archaeologist of Conrad, Montana, may have seen portions of this old Indian trail some twenty-five miles southwest of Choteau. It was marked by travois ruts, occasional stone piles, and stone tipi circles, the sites of overnight encampments en route. Lewis understood that "evidences of this trail following the foothills, just east of the main Rockies, are to be found for many miles."⁹

At its northern extremity, present Calgary, Alberta, the Old North Trail connected with two trails leading northward to Fort Edmonton.¹⁰

Just above Fort Benton, so the old Indians have told me, was

⁷ James Doty to Isaac I. Stevens., December 20, 1854, Indian Office Records.

⁸ Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 435-40.

⁹ H. P. Lewis, manuscript, *Bison Kills of Montana*. (Typescript copy in Missouri River Basin Archaeological Survey Offices, Lincoln, Nebraska), Chapter X, 6-7.

¹⁰ Hugh Dempsey, *Historic Sites of the Province of Alberta*, 50-51.

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427 an ideal fording place where the Missouri River could be crossed in waters little over knee deep. Many trails led southward from Fort Benton. In the summer of 1853, Governor Isaac I. Stevens questioned Blackfoot leaders about these travel routes.

Those Indians whom I interrogated had frequently crossed over to the upper waters of the Platte and Snake Rivers, and they informed me that the whole country was open, and that there would be no difficulty in moving from Fort Benton, over quite a number of trails, to the emigrant route from the States, via Fort Laramie and South Pass to Salt Lake; and they described the country as being, for the most part, a very desirable one, excellent for voyaging, and abounding in wood, water and grass.¹¹

726 Certainly the Blackfeet knew their way to the Oregon Trail well. Some years earlier, on a journey southward to this "Great Medicine Road" of the whites, the courageous Piegan chief Little Dog, led an attack on an emigrant train. In the valley of the Snake River, Little Dog and his men selected a favorable position along the trail to Oregon and awaited the approach of white men's wagons. Unaware of any danger ahead, a wagon train moved into the Indian ambush. The Indians fired, rushed upon the emigrants, massacred the men, and plundered the wagons. They found a box filled with strange objects which 727 Little Dog thought were "brass buttons without eyes." The Blackfoot raiders were perfectly familiar with brass buttons. They had obtained them from traders in their own country. But of what value were heavy, glittering, metal buttons without eyes? The Indians cached them in the rocks overlooking Snake River and proceeded homeward with their more useful booty.

Years later, when Little Dog became familiar with American gold coins, he realized his folly in leaving those "brass buttons without eyes" buried far away in the valley of the Snake River. He told his story to the traders at Fort Benton, and they encouraged him to go after his cache of coins. But Little Dog, then

¹¹ Stevens, "Narrative," PRR, XII, 101.

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renowned as a great friend of the whites, could not be persuaded to return to the scene of his savage attack on the emigrant train.¹² 727

Although the Small Robes paid friendly visits to the Flatheads west of the Rockies, the other Piegan bands and the Blood and Northern Blackfoot tribes knew the overmountain country only through the observations of their war parties. A favorite route of Blackfoot war expeditions against the Flatheads followed the Dearborn River upstream, went over Cadotte's Pass, and then down the river on the west side of the divide which still bears their name—Big Blackfoot. Farther west, Blackfoot war parties occasionally ambushed the Flatheads as they passed through a narrow defile on their way eastward to hunt buffalo on the plains. This canyon, near present Missoula, the traders named the Hell Gate, because "it was as safe to enter the gates of hell as to go into that pass."¹³ 484 721 487

The Marias Pass, which connected the headwaters of the Marias River and those of the Flathead River on the western side of the continental divide, afforded the most gradual crossing of the Rockies. However, Little Dog told Governor Stevens in 1853 that the Blackfeet had not used this pass for many years and that it had become overgrown with underbrush. Stevens attributed its disuse to "some superstition of the Blackfeet."¹⁴ My older informants gave a more practical reason for its avoidance by their war parties. Marias Pass was long, meandering, and indirect. They preferred the steeper but quicker short cut over Cut Bank Pass at the head of Cut Bank Creek and down Nyack Creek and the middle fork of the Flathead River on the west. 487

North of the Canadian boundary, Crow's Nest Pass was much used by war parties en route to the camps of the Kutenais, even though game was more scarce along this trail than in the favored passes farther south.

Some Blackfoot Indians journeyed down the Missouri, through the territory of their Assiniboin enemies and beyond Fort Union, 484 648

¹² Bradley, "Manuscript," *MHSC*, Vol. IX, 335-40.

¹³ Father De Smet knew this gap as "Devil's gate" in 1846 (De Smet, *Life, Letters and Travels*, II, 58a).

¹⁴ "Narrative," *FRR*, XII, 106.

Yet, whether the Blackfeet actually hunted in the southern headwaters of the Missouri prior to the 1830s is questionable. I have found no contemporary description of a Blackfeet hunting camp in this area prior to the 1830s. F. V. Hayden, who obtained much of his data from experienced fur traders, wrote in 1862, "Previous to the opening of the trade with these Indians on the Upper Missouri, they sold all their skins to the Hudson's Bay Company, seldom visiting the headwaters of the Missouri, except for marauding purposes." (Hayden, 1862, p. 249).

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Peter Koch, in his historical sketch of the Gallatin Valley, which was published in 1896, stated, "The Gallatin valley itself has not been the permanent abode of any tribe of Indians since the beginning of this century. It has been debatable ground, claimed by the Blackfeet...but really a common fighting ground for all the surrounding tribes. Hunting and fighting parties of the Crows, the Blackfeet, the Bannacks, the Nez Percés, the Flatheads, the Snakes, traversed it constantly on their way to the hunting grounds of the Yellowstone or the trapping grounds of the Snake river plains; but none of the tribes made their home here, since white men have been in the country." (Koch, 1896, pp. 127-128).

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In view of the facts that they traded on the Saskatchewan and that there was no dearth of buffalo on the plains south of that river it does not sound reasonable that the Blackfeet tribes would

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21: Hungry Wolf F-4,5 (ca. 1972) 1977
NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Blood

Since there were no other activities on the afternoon of this fourth day in camp, we took the opportunity to return to our house, along the Bullhorn Coulee. I wanted to pick up some yellow paint for the Horns and to water our horses and fill up their trough. And SikskiAki and I were looking forward to a refreshing bath in our private swimming hole. 000

When we got home that's the first thing we did. A few cattle ranches between our place and the mountains keep us from drinking the otherwise clear water, but they sure don't keep us from lying in the cool flow of the river. Then we relaxed quietly on a blanket in the warmth of Sun.

We enjoyed the privacy not possible at the campground. There, unexpected visitors can drop by at any time. In the Old Days, visitors were probably reassuring in the northern plains, vast and lurking with danger and enemy. But even then, men sometimes went on the warpath to "get away from it all." On the warpath they had the opportunity to reevaluate themselves and family and friends. When they returned, they could be assured of a change in routine, with new adventures to talk about, new horses to train and ride, and new possessions to admire and share. 156 721 [574]

Women seldom had the opportunity for privacy, except when they went down to the river for water or to the woods for fuel. Only a few husbands allowed their wives to share in the adventures of hunting and horse raiding. Most were confined to the daily chores of child care and housekeeping. 156 [462]

Sun was low in the sky, an evening ember still shooting its rays across to us, as we drove back to the camp in the east. There, the Buttes looked like flaming sentinels watching over the flat where the camp was. Just before dipping below the horizon, Sun's last rays bathed the Buttes in orange colors, leaving the edges of the fissures and caves outlined in red, their insides already black with darkness. 000

The road between the Buttes and the reserve is unmarked, but we all know it as the Belly 487 ●

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21: Hungry Wolf F-4,5 (ca. 1972) 1977

NF6 Blackfoot NF6

Blood

Buttes Road. We turned off this road and followed the old wagon trail downhill to the edge of the camp's flat. The trail wound its way over ruts, past gullies, past abandoned badger and fox holes. A lone cottonwood post, forked at the top and surrounded by a few smaller posts, outlined the shape of a Medicine Lodge from a past holy gathering. The missing posts had either been carried off by families in need of firewood during our cold winters (which can go to fifty below!) or else were eaten by a pack of hungry porcupines.

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Back at camp, we entered our tipi somewhat anxiously. Every time we leave our Bundle we fear it might be stolen. Yes, stolen! Right there in the Sun Dance Encampment. Not stolen by a thief, although that possibility exists, but stolen by one of our own People who might still believe in the Old Ways. You see, there is a custom among our People that helps anyone who wants to obtain the Power of a holy Bundle without having to ask for it or offer the Owner reasons why the Bundle is needed. If such an individual has the property necessary for the transfer, he can find a Bundle in the home of an absent Owner and then sneak in and steal it.

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To steal a sacred Bundle, a person must be a previous Owner, preferably of the Bundle he is about to steal. He must make incense, say a prayer for success, and then call out four coups before he can take the Bundle out of the lodge. If the person is not qualified to do this, he may enlist the help of some older man. Once the Bundle is stolen, the person must still satisfy the Owner with payments.

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For a stolen Bundle, the payments are expected to be about twice what they would normally have been. I will give you an example of this custom later on.

My Teachers had warned me that our Bundle could be stolen. They pointed out that one respected Medicine Pipe Owner with the same fears as ours took his Bundle back home, while the other Owners never even brought theirs to camp. During the Piegan Sun Dance earlier

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114 Kipp was a born Indian trader, in the most literal sense of the word,
175 for his father was that intrepid Captain James Kipp of the American
439 Fur Company who in 1831 built Fort Piegan near the mouth of the
Marias River, in order to take the trade of the Blackfoot tribes—the
Blackfeet, the Bloods, and the Pikunis—from its northern rival, the
Hudson's Bay Company; and his mother *Sahkwi Abki*, "Earth
Woman," was the fine daughter of that Mandan Indian chief *Mah-
totopa*, of whom George Catlin wrote so admiringly in his letters.³
At an early age son Joseph had become an employee of his father's
company at Fort Benton, then later of Carroll and Steel, who took
over the fort when, in 1865, the American Fur Company went out
of business. Still later he had continued in the trade for himself and
had done exceptionally well at the posts he had built in Alberta, Fort
Standoff, and, later, Fort Kipp on Belly River. During those years,
chiefly because of his sagacity and kindness of heart, he had at-
tained great influence with the Blackfoot tribes. Up to the time of
his death in 1913 they made no moves of importance to them with-
out first obtaining his counsel and advice.⁴

439 During the winter of 1878-79 we had a good trade with the
Blackfoot tribes, the Pikunis, Blackfeet, and Bloods, getting from
them two thousand buffalo robes and several thousand deer, wolf,
[131] beaver, and antelope hides. Came spring and the tribes left, the Black-
[361] feet and Bloods returning to their reservations in Alberta Province,
Canada, and the Pikunis going to summer hunt along the foot of the
Rockies, seventy-five miles to the west of us.

● [487] A hundred yards below our fort was the Marias River crossing
[133] of the Fort Benton-Fort Macleod, Alberta, wagon road. All of the
supplies for that northern fort and other southern Alberta settle-
ments came on steamboats up the Missouri River to Fort Benton, and
from there were carried on to their destinations by bull trains, horse
000 trains, mule trains. In June, John Haney's outfit of three horse-teams,
eight spans of horses and two wagons per team, en route with goods
for Fort Macleod, made camp one evening at Pend d'Oreille Coulee,

[113] ³ George Catlin, *North American Indians* (Edinburgh, 1926), I, 104, 118, 129-32,
163-74.

[113] ⁴ For a longer sketch of the life of Joseph Kipp, see James W. Schultz, *Friends of
My Life as an Indian* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), chap. V.

No More Buffalo

Our Indian friend and his family with whom we briefly stopped 178
had only a little flour and some dried service berries in their lodge.
He said that game had become so scarce that the hunters were often 224
days in killing a deer or antelope, and worse, many of them had used
all of their cartridges and had no furs or hides with which to get
more from the agency trader. We gave him ten dollars, and happily 437
smiling, truly grateful, he and his wives hurried up to the trader's
store to buy beans, bacon, baking powder, sugar, and tea, provisions
that, they said, they had been without since the extermination of the
buffalo. In the evening, a number of prominent men of the tribe 731
came in to visit and smoke with us and to tell of their need for food.
Their condition worried me. Still, I did not then realize, as I did
later, how serious the outlook was for the tribe, else, doubtless, I
could have helped save many who were to die from starvation in
the next few months.

Early on the following morning, avoiding the agency, we struck 133
the big Indian trail paralleling the mountains, were joined by our 487
three friends with team and wagon, and turned northward into
country new to me. It was my first close view of the Rocky Moun-
tains. I could not keep my eyes off them, rising so abruptly, tower-
ing so high above the plain. Had they names, I asked. "No, only that
farther one in sight ahead, standing out as though in the lead of the
others, its east face an almost sheer cliff." That was *Nina Istukwi*,
"Chief Mountain" of the Blackfoot tribes; Abbot told me. I thought
that never had a mountain been more appropriately named.

At noon we turned down into the beautiful, well-timbered valley
of Cut Bank Creek and rested for a time beside the stream. I noted 136
that its deep, clear pools fairly teemed with trout, many of large
size. Our friend Oliver Sandoval, or *Imoyim* ("Looks Furry"),
was the son of a noted Spanish employee of the old American Fur
Company and a staid, competent Pikuni woman. Of us all, he alone
had ever been to Chief Mountain lakes and knew of a possible way
for us to get to the lower one of them with wagons. Leaving Cut
Bank Creek and following his lead, we crossed the south and then
the middle fork of Milk River, the *Kinuk Sisakta* ("Little River"),
and then turned into a branch trail running northwest, and up the

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Ours were the first wagons ever upon this branch of the great north-and-south foot of the mountain trail. As we followed it down, we were obliged here and there to cut out quaking aspens and young pines growing in it and heavily to brush several narrow, boggy streamlets in order to cross with the wagons. So going, we came at noon to the foot of the lower lake, turned up along it upon a well-used trail, and made camp on the first of the outjutting points above the outlet. We did no hunting that afternoon but in a few minutes caught, in the first pool of the river, enough trout for our supper and breakfast. To my surprise, there were three varieties of them: Mackinaws, natives, and another that I could not then identify—the Dolly Varden, as I was later to learn. 487 137 133 000 136

We regretted that we had not brought saddle horses with which to explore our surroundings and hunt. In lieu of them, on the following morning we crossed the river with team and wagon at a ford a few hundred yards below the foot of the lake. Then we picketed the horses and set out for a long, flat-topped, bare-topped mountain close to the west of the lake, its north end almost a sheer cliff of great height. We took to a steep, well-timbered ridge running up to the mountain and, unused to walking and climbing, soon tired; so much that, upon arriving at the timber line, we had no desire to make the still steeper climb up the shale and rocks to the top of the mountain. Our friend Sandoval said that he had heard the Kutenai Indians tell of a lick close under the north cliff of the mountain that was much used by the various game animals; so, after a good rest, we set out to find it, traveling slowly, cautiously, just within the edge of the timber and scanning constantly the long, steep slope for sight of game. So going until the east end of the cliff was straight above us, we discovered farther on a band of bighorn ewes and young leaving the timber, traveling away from us up the bare slope, beyond range of our rifles. They were not new to me. I had seen hundreds of them on the cliffs of the Missouri River badlands, and had even killed a few. What I was looking for, was most eager to see, were John Healy's "ibexes." 000 136 000

² The hope has not yet been realized; they are still labeled Saint Mary lakes on modern maps.

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000 shale, and was still. Cried Yellow Fish, in Blackfoot, "Oh, Ho, Hai! This Fisher Hat, he did not kneel and rest his gun; just stood and aimed it, and with one shot killed the very far-off bighead."

Translating that for Grinnell, I added: "And so, appropriately, this where we are gets a name: it is Singleshot Mountain." That is the name it bears today.

The ram proved to be full grown, and very fat. Its head and horns alone were a heavy burden for one man. With it, and all the meat that we could carry, we turned back down to camp and had a feast of well-broiled ribs.

224 We found that there was a well-used Indian and game trail run-
487 ning up the west side of the upper lake. It was not used by the Black-
foot tribes, except occasional war parties of them, Yellow Fish told us. It was a trail of other-side-of-the-mountains tribes: Kutenais, Kalispels, Spokanes; and of the North Cutthroats (the Stonies), a mountain tribe of Assiniboines in Alberta. Blackfeet, Bloods, and [461] Pikunis never had been mountain hunters. They had not liked to climb steep mountains for the meat they wanted, when on horse-back they could run herds of buffalo and make great killings of them.

000 On a very warm, windless morning we took up this trail and, having followed it for about five miles, came to a creek that headed up back of Singleshot Mountain and the next one south of it. Saying that he would go well up the creek and try to kill a goat or bighorn, Yellow Fish started up it; Grinnell and I strolled down to the lake, sat on a long point running out in it, admired the view that we had of the mountains to the east and south, and talked of this and that, regretting that we had no saddle horses. Grinnell vowed that he would return a year from then, when, with a complete saddle and pack outfit, we would explore the source of Swift Current River. Passed several hours, and then Yellow Fish, up in the mountains, began shooting. Fourteen shots, as fast as he could work the lever of his Henry rifle; a pause, and then fourteen more shots; another pause, and then, more slowly, still other shots. He was, we thought, making a great killing of bighorns or goats, and we were much worried about it. We did not believe in killing game that was not actually 763
224 needed for food or for museum placement and study. We returned

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114 General Custer and General Miles, who was with Major Reno on the day of the Custer fight; J. B. (Jack) Monroe, experienced mountain man, hunter, and trapper (not related to Hugh Monroe).

Jack Monroe readily agreed to join our exploring expedition, and when Grinnell arrived early in September we met him at the agency with team and wagon, loaded with a complete camping outfit and the requisite number of saddle horses and pack horses for our purpose. But we were not to make an immediate start for the mountains; the Pikuni chief insisted that their good friend Fisher Hat (Grinnell) visit and council with them. Old Red Eagle, owner of the sacred elk-tongue medicine pipe and bundle, unwrapped it in honor of him, an hours-long ceremony of fervent singing of sacred songs, sacred dancing, and fervent prayers, in which Sun, Moon, and Morning Star were implored to give long and full life to Fisher Hat, true, helpful friend of the Pikunis. The sincerity of the old man and his men and women helpers, their absolute faith in their sky gods, was very affecting, even to us, unbelievers in any faith.

133 In good time we made camp, as in the previous autumn, close below the foot of Upper St. Mary Lake and on the west side of the river. Two days later, after caching most of our belongings—tent, groceries, and the like—we set out with saddle horses and a couple of pack horses to go up Swift Current River. From its junction with St. Mary River, we followed a good Indian and game trail up its north side, passed several small lakes in its course, and that evening camped on the shore of a beautiful lake at the junction of several of its forks—the Jealous Woman's Lake of the Blackfoot tribes, but now, to our great disgust, named Lake Josephine!

[487] During the summer I had often talked with Hugh Monroe, Rising Wolf, about the St. Mary lakes—Swift Current River country, and he had told me that, years back, with his family he had often camped at the foot of Lower St. Mary Lake; once had wintered there; but had never gone up Swift Current farther than its third lake nor up St. Mary Valley farther than the foot of its upper lake, for always game of all kinds—buffalo, moose, elk, and deer—had been plentiful close to his camp. So when, in the morning, we saddled and